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For Immediate Release

**Attorney General warns consumers about scams that promise large lottery
or sweepstakes prizes.**

Wilmington, DE – Attorney General Joseph R. Biden, III today issued a warning about a growing trend of unsolicited counterfeit check, lottery and sweepstakes scams that claim a recipient has won a prize. In these scams, consumers are tricked into wiring or sending cashiers checks worth thousands of dollars to claim prizes. These scams are designed to defraud money and gain personal information from consumers.

These schemes typically follow one of three basic forms:

- A victim receives an unsolicited letter announcing they have won a lottery or a sweepstakes, along with a realistic-looking phony check. The recipient is asked to deposit the check and immediately wire a portion of money back to the scammer to cover fees or taxes associated with the winning.
- A victim is asked to help move a large amount of cash out of a foreign country. Respondents receive an authentic-looking phony check with instructions to deposit it and wire a large portion of the funds to an overseas address.
- A victim is directed to claim a lottery winning by quoting a reference, batch and winning number and provide their full name, address and telephone number. Afterward, winners are directed to deposit money to an international bank where their winnings are allegedly located, allegedly to cover courier costs.

“The criminals receive the money and victims are left holding the bag in these fraudulent schemes,” said Attorney General Biden. “Victims typically lose \$2,500 or more, and never received the promised winnings. And the crooks are almost certainly from outside the United States, impossible to trace and punish.

High quality printers and scanners are often used to make the fraudulent checks look authentic. They may be printed with the names and addresses of legitimate financial institutions, contain watermarks, and reflect real bank account and routing numbers. Victims often believe that a check must be authentic if their bank accepts it and makes the funds available. However, federal law requires banks to make funds from a check available by the next business day for bank cashier’s checks and Postal money orders, and within five days for corporate checks. Meanwhile, it may take several days for a bank to fully “clear” a check and catch a forgery.

Officials rarely recover such funds and catch and punish the con-artists. Consumers who fall victims to these fraudulent schemes can be liable to the bank for all of the money they wired overseas in addition to any of the proceeds they have already spent.

Moreover, scammers often ask their victims to keep the information confidential until their claim is processed, alleging that the confidentiality is an important anti-fraud measure.

“The Delaware Department of Justice Consumer Protection Unit has received increasing numbers of reports in recent months from Delawareans who have received fraudulent lottery or sweepstakes winnings letters,” Attorney General Biden stated. “These crooks prey on vulnerable, often elderly, consumers who trust their offenders. I caution every consumer to be aware of these schemes and to report them to the authorities.”

Unfortunately, it is likely that the money is gone, with little hope of tracing or recovering it – usually in a foreign country. Wired money can be received almost anywhere around the world, no matter where it appears to be addressed.

Contact the Delaware Department of Justice for advice and information on agencies that may be able to open an investigation or assist you. Visit the Delaware Department of Justice website at www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov and click on “Protecting Consumers” for more information about ways to report this fraudulent activity.

Tips to avoid counterfeit check sweepstakes and lottery scams:

- If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Never provide your credit card or personal information to anyone unless you are certain the contact is legitimate and from a reputable company.
- Never believe a solicitation from a party which claims to guarantee you a prize.
- Never send funds from a check you’ve received to pay “taxes or fees” for a promised sweepstakes or lottery prize.
- If you receive a telephone call from a direct marketer who promises instant lottery prizes, end the call immediately. Lotteries in the U.S. do not conduct business in this matter.
- If you accept payment by check, ask for a check drawn on a bank with a local branch and contact the bank to ensure the check is valid. If that’s not possible call the bank on the check and ask if it is valid. Get the bank’s phone number from directory assistance or an Internet site that you trust, not from the check or the person who gave you the check.

Contact information:

Department of Justice Consumer Protection Unit:

Consumer Hotline (*****) (toll-free.) E-mail: *****, website. The Consumer Protection Unit can advise you on how to proceed if you've lost money.

State and Local Police Departments

Contact the Delaware State Police and local police departments to file a report if you've lost money. You need to document your loss and you may need to explain that you did not intend to defraud your bank. You may need to make repayment arrangements with your bank.

U.S. Secret Service

The U.S. Secret Service recommends that victims call them if they've lost money.

Federal Trade Commission

Contact the FTC's Consumer Response Center at www.ftc.gov, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357, or 600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20580.

"Phonebusters"

If there is a clear connection in Canada to the scam, and if you have lost money, contact Phonebusters – the Canadian anti-fraud call center that is a cooperative effort of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ontario Provincial Police, and the Federal Competition Bureau (equivalent to the U.S. FTC.) Call toll-free to 888-495-8501. The address is: Phonebusters, PO Box 686, North Bay, Ontario, P1B8J8 CANADA. E-mail: info@phonebusters.com

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service

Contact your local post office through your local telephone directory or www.usps.gov/websites/depart/inspect. See [USPIS flyer on lottery and sweepstakes scams through the mail](#).

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